I had now taken the first step, but I had taken it without any notion of what I was doing. I was innocent of all art, and while I loved the actual doing of my part, I hated the labour that led up to it. But the time was soon to come when I was to be fired by a passion for work. Meanwhile I was unconsciously learning a number of lessons which were to be most useful to rne in my subsequent career.

TRAINING IN SHAKESPEARE

1856—1859

From April 1856 until 1859 I acted constantly at the Princess's Theatre with the Keans, spending the summer holidays in acting at Ryde. My whole life was the theatre, and naturally all my early memories are connected with it. At breakfast father would begin the day's " coaching." Often I had to lay down my fork and say my lines. He would conduct these extra rehearsals anywhere—in the street, the 'bus—we were never safe ! I remember vividly going iato a chemist's shop and being stood upon a stool to say my part to the chemist ! Such leisure as I had from my profession was spent in " minding " the younger children—an occupation in which I delighted. They all had very pretty hair, and I used to wash it and comb it out until it looked as fine and bright as floss silk.

It is argued now that stage life is bad for a young child, and children are not allowed by law to go on the stage until they are ten years old—quite a mature age in my young days 1 I cannot discuss the

whole question here, and must content myself with saying that during my three years at the Princess's I was a very strong, happy, and healthy child. I was never out of the bill except during the run of "A Midsummer Night's Dream/'